

November 8, 2000

Mr. Dan Howell, Executive Director
Anne Carlsen Center for Children
301 7th Avenue NW
Jamestown, ND 58401-2971

Dear Mr. Howell,

The North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI) Office of Special Education conducted a Verification Review for the Anne Carlsen Center for Children (ACCC) on October 17-18, 2000 for the purpose of assessing compliance in the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and assisting ACCC in developing strategies to improve results for children with disabilities. The IDEA Amendments of 1997 focus on "access to services" as well as "improving results for children and youth with disabilities". In the same way, the continuous improvement monitoring process implemented by NDDPI is designed to focus federal, state and local resources on improved results for children with disabilities and their families through a working partnership among NDDPI, the Anne Carlsen Center for Children, parents and stakeholders.

In conducting its review of the Anne Carlsen Center for Children, NDDPI applied the standards set forth in the IDEA 97 statute and Part B regulations (34 CFR Part 300), as they were in effect at the time of the review. On March 12, 1999, the United States Department of Education published the final Part B regulations that took effect on May 11, 1999. In planning and implementing improvement strategies to address the findings in this report, the Anne Carlsen Center for Children should ensure that all improvement strategies are consistent with the new final regulations.

Enclosed you will find an Executive Summary of the Report, an introduction including background information, and a description of issues and findings. NDDPI will work with you to develop improvement strategies to ensure improved results for children with disabilities.

Thank you for the assistance and cooperation provided by the Anne Carlsen Center for Children staff and Collaborative Review Steering Committee members during our review. Throughout the course of the review, you and your staff were responsive to requests for information and assistance from NDDPI personnel.

Thank you for the continued efforts toward the goal of achieving better results for children and youth with disabilities in North Dakota. Since the enactment of IDEA and its predecessor, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act, one of the basic goals of the law, ensuring that

children with disabilities receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE), has largely been achieved. Today, families can have positive visions for their children's future.

While schools have made great progress, significant challenges remain. Now that children with disabilities are receiving services, the critical issue is to place greater emphasis on attaining better results. To that end, we look forward to working with the Anne Carlsen Center for Children in partnership to continue to improve the lives of individuals with disabilities.

Sincerely,

Robert C. Rutten, ND Director of Special Education
Department of Public Instruction

Enclosure

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ANNE CARLSEN CENTER FOR CHILDREN (ACCC)

The attached report contains the results of the first two phases (Collaborative Review and Verification Review) of the North Dakota Continuous Improvement Monitoring of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part B, for the Anne Carlsen Center for Children (ACCC) during the 1999 – 2000 and 2000 – 2001 school years. The process is designed to focus resources on improving results for children with disabilities and their families through enhanced partnerships between the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI), the ACCC, parents and stakeholders. The Collaborative Review phase of the monitoring process included the completion of a Self-Assessment under the direction of a local Steering Committee. The Verification Review phase included interviews with local program and school administrators, service providers, teachers, and targeted reviews of student records. Information obtained from these data sources was shared in a meeting attended by staff from the Anne Carlsen Center for Children Collaborative Review Steering Committee and staff from the ND Department of Public Instruction. This report contains a detailed description of the process utilized to collect data, and to determine strengths, areas of noncompliance with IDEA, and suggestions for improvement in each of the core IDEA areas.

Education of Children and Youth with Disabilities **Part B of IDEA**

Strengths

The NDDPI Verification Review team identified the following strengths:

- Transition planning includes a high level of community interaction and functional skill training.
- Ongoing involvement of school improvement activities, continuous improvement planning, and ongoing training activities for personnel.
- Positive feedback from community providers and employers regarding facility services and level of involvement.
- Strong documentation and record keeping.
- Strong, effective, and supportive administration and staff. Minimal staff turnover, evidence of teamwork and a positive working environment were noted.
- Assistive technology and mobility training were both recognized as superior.

Areas of Noncompliance

The NDDPI Verification Review team identified no areas of noncompliance with Part B of IDEA. File reviews, staff interviews and review of past monitoring reports and the self assessment document yielded no areas of noncompliance with Part B of IDEA. Suggested areas of improvement however, were noted and are described in the report.

ANNE CARLSEN CENTER FOR CHILDREN (ACCC) MONITORING REPORT
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INTRODUCTION

The Anne Carlsen Center for Children (ACCC) Self-Assessment (August 2000) report contains information describing the school, its mission and role in collaborating with school districts throughout ND and the structure of the residential program and services. The ACCC is a private residential facility that provides services for students from school districts across the state of ND and the upper Midwest. ACCC was initially established in 1941 and has a rich history of providing a quality education to student with significant disabilities. ACCC has demonstrated a commitment and high level of involvement in the School Improvement Process. A comprehensive and sound structure for improvement of services is already in place. Many issues identified in the Self-Assessment as areas for improvement have already been included in improvement plans that are being implemented within the facility.

Administrative Structures and Children Served: ACCC has 7 general educators and 7 special educators along with a variety of support staff (occupational therapists, speech therapists, physical therapists, social worker, psychologist, vocational staff, teacher aides, dorm counselors, librarian, school nurse, etc.) to provide programming for students. At the present time, ACCC has an enrollment of 50 students, ranging in age from 3 – 21 years of age, with 4 students currently enrolled as day students. Enrollment has increased slightly over the past several years. Approximately 40% of students are identified as students with mental retardation, 28% students with autism and 28% students with Other Health Impairments (December 1, 1999 Child Count).

Verification Review and Data Collection: The ACCC began the Collaborative Review process in January 2000. The Self-Assessment report was submitted to NDDPI in August 2000. The Self-Assessment included data gathered by student record review, survey information collected as part of the school improvement process, and stakeholder surveys conducted as part of the self-assessment process in 2000. Stakeholder surveys were distributed to parents, staff and students.

NDDPI visited the ACCC on October 17-18, 2000, for the purpose of collecting data to verify information provided through the Collaborative Review process, including new requirements under the IDEA Amendments of 1997. NDDPI staff members met with the ACCC Collaborative Review Steering Committee to discuss the Self-Assessment and to finalize the schedule for file reviews and staff interviews. Student record reviews, including Individualized Education Program plans (IEP's) and Integrated Written Assessment Reports (IWARs) were conducted. Interviews were conducted with ten ACCC staff members responsible for providing educational services. Representatives from ND Protection & Advocacy Project, the ND Department of Human Services, Disability Services (Vocational Rehabilitation and Developmental Disabilities) were also interviewed.

Improvement Planning: In response to this report, the ACCC is strongly encouraged to submit a copy of an action plan including responses for the identified areas of improvement within 60 days of receipt of this report. The NDDPI special education regional coordinator assigned to ACCC will serve as needed, as a resource for development of the action plan.

I. ZERO REJECT

All children with disabilities must be provided with a free appropriate public education (FAPE). Given the environment, purpose and design of ACCC, the area of Zero Reject does not apply.

II. NONDISCRIMINATORY EVALUATION

Any child with a suspected disability must receive a full, individualized evaluation, which meets specific standards, and includes information from a variety of sources.

Information included in the ACCC Self-Assessment report indicated an area of concern regarding parent participation throughout the evaluation process. Parent participation is sought constantly; however, it was reported parents do not often participate in the evaluation planning process. In addition, it was noted that parents have minimal, if any questions regarding evaluation outcomes. The ACCC Steering Committee concluded that parents often do not have enough information about the needs of their children to participate in the evaluation process. Typically, parents trust the staff of ACCC to routinely identify evaluation outcomes.

During interviews NDDPI conducted as part of the Verification Review, respondents were asked to “Describe the evaluation process.” Copies of evaluation plans and integrated written assessment reports (IWAR) were also reviewed during the student record review process. During interviews with special education staff members, the evaluation process, including the use of the Assessment Plan and completion of the IWAR, was appropriately described.

NDDPI reviewed and analyzed the data and identified the following area for improvement.

SUGGESTION FOR IMPROVED RESULTS FOR CHILDREN

The ACCC Steering Committee has identified that parent participation is an area of concern and have implemented additional methods to increase communication between parent and child. More information given to parents about the progress of their children may lead to increased participation in the evaluation process and knowledge of expectations regarding educational growth. ACCC is encouraged to continue its efforts to actively involve parents in the evaluation process.

III. FREE APPROPRIATE PUBLIC EDUCATION

An IEP team, which includes the child’s teacher, the child’s parent(s), an administrator, and a special education teacher, must develop an educational program tailored to meet the child’s unique needs.

File reviews revealed that efforts to secure home district representation at the IEP meetings was not always possible, but the number of IEP meetings without home district involvement were minimal. Attempts by ACCC staff to include home district representation were adequate.

Participation in state and district-wide assessment or alternate assessment is a new requirement within the reauthorization. Since this is a new requirement, it was emphasized during interviews with ACCC school personnel and student file reviews.

Since the determination of need for and the provision of extended school year services is an issue for schools across North Dakota, and has also been identified as an area of concern by the federal monitors during their most recent visit, this issue was emphasized during interviews with school personnel. Student file reviews completed by NDDPI staff also included the IEP components indicated above with no area of concern noted.

Transition, which is a major part of the IEP process for students ages 14 and over, was identified by OSEP as a major emphasis within the reauthorization of IDEA. Specific areas of change include: community-based training; on-the-job training opportunities; availability of vocational courses in local schools; availability of vocational assessments; and independent living skill development. During interviews that NDDPI conducted within the Verification Review, specific questions regarding transition planning were included. Student file reviews completed by NDDPI monitors also included items based on transition changes as a result of the reauthorization of IDEA.

NDDPI reviewed and analyzed the data and identified the following strength and suggestions for improvement.

STRENGTH

Transition planning at ACCC is strong and effective in practice. Positive collaborative efforts were verified by all partners. Evidence of a strong team process was reflected in planning, discussion and specific activities to promote a seamless transition for students with disabilities. Resources are utilized effectively and good working relationships have been developed with Vocational Rehabilitation, Developmental Disabilities and various community employers.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVED RESULTS FOR CHILDREN

Maintain efforts to ensure participation by home district representatives involved in IEP meetings.

Participation in state and district-wide assessment or alternate assessment is a new requirement within the reauthorization of IDEA. A review of students and determination of who will participate will be necessary. NDDPI personnel are available to provide in-service and technical assistance.

Transition was not always reflected in the development of the IEP. Specifically, 'Post School Outcomes' and 'Agency Collaboration and Responsibilities' were not always documented, even though the planning has occurred and is strong. Transition components in the IEP need to be incorporated into the document so the effective process is well documented. Again, NDDPI personnel are available to provide in-service and technical assistance.

IV. LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT

To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities must be educated with their non-disabled peers. Placement decisions must be based on the goals and objectives in the child's IEP.

The summary of information included in the ACCC Self-Assessment report did not indicate concerns regarding LRE. During interviews conducted by NDDPI monitors as part of the Verification Review, respondents were asked to "Describe the process for determining LRE". Files were reviewed with regard to the options available and justification for the option chosen.

NDDPI reviewed and analyzed the data and identified the following suggestion for improvement.

SUGGESTION FOR IMPROVED RESULTS FOR CHILDREN

Although effective collaboration between ACCC personnel and public school teachers is not a regulatory requirement of IDEA, efforts to improve collaboration will benefit all children, including children with disabilities. The improved relationship with Jamestown Public Schools and Buffalo Valley Special Education will create opportunities for involvement with general education. Activities to be considered for improvement planning may include planning together, co-teaching/team teaching, involvement with lyceums, vocational center, and other activities to access general education and peer interaction with non-disabled peers.

V. PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Parents have the right to have access to their child's educational records. Parental consent is required for initial evaluation, reevaluation, and placement. Parents must be included in IEP team decisions, and parents must be notified of their right to appeal.

The ACCC Self-Assessment report summarized information from parent surveys conducted as part of the school improvement process. In general, parents express comfort with their personal level of involvement in educational programs in which their children participate. ACCC staff acknowledge that families are involved, however, it is not always evident that families are "fully" involved. Some families tend to view the school personnel as the "experts" and prefer to leave educational decision-making to the professionals. It was noted in the Self-Assessment report that ACCC staff agree that continued efforts are needed to help all families feel welcomed and involved in education programs for their children.

During interviews conducted by NDDPI monitors, ACCC personnel were asked to "Describe the extent to which parents are involved in evaluation and IEP meetings." Documentation of this involvement was also included in student file reviews completed by NDDPI.

NDDPI reviewed and analyzed the data and identified the following strength and suggestion for improvement.

STRENGTH

Positive feedback from parents and families indicates a level of satisfaction with school services. Many parents attend IEP meetings and are comfortable with their own level of involvement.

SUGGESTION FOR IMPROVED RESULTS FOR CHILDREN

Appropriate procedural safeguards are in place and interviews with school personnel indicated that parents often attend IEP meetings, however, there are differing levels of actual participation and decision-making. NDDPI strongly encourages the ACCC to continue to offer information and training opportunities to families of children with disabilities. Parental involvement has long been recognized as an important indicator of a school's success and parent involvement has positive effects on children's attitudes and behavior. Partnerships positively impact achievement, improve parents' attitudes toward the school, and benefit school personnel as well. The ACCC Steering Committee has discussed using Internet capabilities to increase communication.

VI. PROCEDURAL SAFEGUARDS

Procedural safeguards, which ensure the fairness of educational decisions, include impartial due process hearings; the right to an independent educational evaluation; written notification to parents explaining their rights; parental consent; and appointment of surrogate parents, when needed.

Information included in the ACCC Self-Assessment report indicated that student records are managed with regard to content, maintenance, security, and disclosure. During the Verification Review process, NDDPI monitors found evidence that the provision of procedural safeguards, including student records management, is an area of strength. No evidence was found to verify the self-assessment finding of inconsistent completion of record inspection forms.

NDDPI reviewed and analyzed the data and identified the following strength.

STRENGTH

The provision of procedural safeguards is an area of strength for ACCC. In addition, parent survey results indicated an awareness of their rights.